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HOUSEMAKERS' CHAT

Monday, July 3, 1939

Subject: "FUR FARMS AND FUR COATS." Information from the Bureau of Biological Survey, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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From clothing habits in medieval Europe to summer fur sales is a far cry. There was a time when fur for clothing was more used by men than by women. In fact, there were laws that said only kings could wear certain furs, only bishops, others. Some kinds only the nobility could wear. And there were classes of people forbidden by law to wear any kind of fur.

Today anyone who can afford it may buy a fur coat, and the cost has been so much reduced by expansion of the industry that a fur or fur-trimmed coat is within reach of most women. It seems as if summer fur sales were advertised earlier each year, presumably in an effort to keep the garment workers employed during the off season for actually wearing furs. In Washington, D. C. one store offered to start making Alaska seal coats for next fall, about the middle of May!

According to Frank G. Ashbrook, of the Biological Survey, it was not until after the discovery of North America that the fur trade really got into its stride. Retail turnover reached as much as half a billion dollars in a recent peak year. Wild fur animals do not supply nearly enough of the fur pelts demanded by modern clothing fashions and standards of comfort. Fur animals are raised extensively in captivity, both in the United States and in other countries.

In China fur-farming is a very old industry. For centuries sheep, goats, and dogs have been bred for their pelts. In central Asia Karakul sheep have long been produced for lamb skins. This industry is also extensive in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and in German Southwest Africa. A few Karakul sheep

were imported into the United States some years ago, but further importations are limited by quarantine regulations. So the Biological Survey has cooperated with the Bureau of Animal Industry in making experimental crosses of those purebred Karakul sheep that had already been imported, with Blackface Highland and Corriedale sheep.

However, silver-fox farming is the most spectacular and important development in fur-animal production under strictly controlled conditions. It has all taken place within about 40 years, since the time that two Canadian farmers started breeding cross and black-or silver-foxes in captivity to obtain entirely black and silver puppies.

The industry has now reached a point where about 300,000 silver-fox pelts are produced annually. Foxes are successfully grown throughout the northern half of the United States from New England westward to Washington and Oregon and in the cooler parts of California. Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan contribute more than 50 percent of the annual crop of fox pelts.

Next in importance to silver fox farming is mink farming. Two hundred thousand mink pelts are produced on fur farms, bringing retailers high prices. A magazine recently carried a story of a movie actress who had her own mink farm, so she could grow her own mink coats! The Biological Survey has inaugurated a number of research projects dealing with the breeding and feeding problems of fox and mink farmers.

Some of the other fur-bearing animals that have been raised in captivity to a certain extent are martens, fishers, skunks, racoons, and opossums. But farming of these animals for fur has not been found a profitable undertaking.

Since the U. S. Government has regulated sealing operations in Alaskan waters, fur seals have had a chance to multiply in numbers. Their handsome pelts are now coming on the market in greater quantities and at prices more within reach of modern incomes than they used to be.

Among the lower priced furs which will attract many this summer there will doubtless be plenty of muskrat and rabbit under various names. Rabbit fur is used more than any other kind, but most of the rabbit fur used in this country is imported. Muskrats are first in numbers among all furs produced in the United States. Whatever the fur is called, the Federal Trade Commission has ruled that the correct name of the fur must be the last word in the descriptive label. If any blend or dye is used simulating another fur, the word "dyed" or "blended" must be inserted between the name signifying the fur that is simulated and the true name of the fur, as "seal-dyed muskrat", or "mink-dyed marmot."

Another rule is that all furs which are shaded, blended, tipped, dyed, or pointed must be so described. And where the name of any country or section is used it shall be the actual country or origin of the fur, as "American opossum."

Many women buy a fur coat for style rather than for durability. But the woman who can have only one fur coat in several years needs to consider carefully how it will wear, and whether or not it is appropriate to her age and the occasions where it will be worn. A mature woman looks well in such furs as Hudson seal, Persian lamb, or flat dark furs, while her daughter can wear raccoon, opossum, leopard, and similar sport types for day-time use. A girl might choose an evening jacket or wrap of white lapin and it would serve her needs very well, while for an older woman, one of the dignified, dressy furs, such as squirrel or mole would be a better choice.

The durable furs at a medium price include muskrat dyed in various ways, raccoon, some of the karakuls and kids, beaver, kolinsky, and skunk. Rabbit will wear like rabbit no matter what name it is sold under- lapin, cony, sealine, electric seal, or any other. Reliable fur dealers use informative labels and are glad to advise their customers on what wear can be expected from a given fur.

Some of the more fragile furs can be used as trimming on cloth coats even though they would not last well if made up into an entire garment. Fur coats and fur trimming are often worn by the rubbing of handbags, belts, buckles, buttons, and jewelry. Also where the forearm rests frequently on the door of an automobile. In choosing a coat, therefore, it is well to notice just where the fur trimming comes, and whether or not it would be excessively rubbed by anything one was in the habit of doing.

